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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the history of American teacher training. The teacher education program provided by Pennsylvania State University, Capitol Campus is described as an example of a present-day American teacher education program. Objectives and means of implementation used at the University are described briefly. A four-item bibliography is included. (MJM)

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American Teacher Training: A Past And Present Perspective

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The life of the teacher and provisions for his professional preparation have changed a great deal since the colonial period in the seventeenth century. In 1647 the citizens of the Massachusetts Bay Colony drafted a law directing that each township of fifty or more householders must appoint a teacher to teach children of the area to read and write. If a community numbered a hundred or more householders, a master was to be appointed to set up a grammar school and prepare students for the University. There was no formal teacher training at this time; teachers were appointed from the populace of the town in which they were to teach.

It is interesting to note that Thomas Jefferson, an early American leader, in proposing a system of free public education suggested that those students who could not qualify for higher education might well become future grammar school teachers. This was in the 1780's. According to Jefferson, those capable of going on to college were destined for greater things than becoming teachers.

In 1827 the newly established Boston English High School required that its teachers be competent to teach American History, Bookeeping. Geometry. Surveying, Algebra, Latin, Greek, General History, Rhetoric, and Logic. The era of specialization obviously had not yet begun.

The advent of institutionalized teacher training in the United States began in 1839 in Lexington, Massachusetts with the establishment of the first state school exclusively concerned with the training of teachers. These early teacher ' colleges were then referred to as normal schools, a name of uncertain origin.

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The essentials of teacher training in this era were set by the founders to include the following:

1. The best methods of governing a school.
2. Instruction in what was referred to as the "peculiar art of teaching."
3. A practice school in which the trainees could have a chance to exercise their learning of instructional principles.
4. A careful review of the common branches of learning with the aim of having the teacher "know things in a masterly way, curiously, nicely, and in their reason." [2]

The growth of the state normal schools was relatively slow until the late 1800's when a period of rapid growth occurred. In 1890 the 135 schools enrolled a total of 26,543 students. Normal school graduates ordinarily became elementary school teachers, with the secondary teachers being generally selected from the colleges and universities.

It is important to note, however, that in many states at this time attendance at a normal school or university was not mandatory for becoming a teacher. All that was officially required was to pass examinations set by the local school authorities.

However, the states gradually established requirements for teachers that included a college degree, beginning in the early 1900's.

This led to an improvement in the academic programs of the normal schools, as they were forced by certification requirements to offer a four year degree program. Originally normal school academics were no better

[2]Krug, Edward, Salient Dates in American Education, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966) P.69

than those of their contemporary high schools and few required high school graduation for admission.

By 1927 all states were certifying teachers on the basis of college attendance. The normal schools became known as state schools in the twentieth century. Colleges and universities developed and expanded teacher training programs.

Various educational philosophies enjoyed ascendancy in American education in the twentieth century. In the early 1900's the schools were generally subject-oriented, with little or no emphasis in the curriculum on such areas as social adjustment. In the late twenties and thirties a flexible learning method known as the Activity Method which included large blocks of interrelated knowledge rather than rigid emphasis on specific subjects. In the forties progressive education became popular in the schools, with its emphasis on child-centered education and individual differences. Although undergoing recurrent criticism from adherents of the essentialist philosophy, with its stress on learning of fundamentals and memorization, the progressive theories of education are still predominant in most American schools. Teacher training institutions have of course, reflected these trends in educational philosophy.

Present American teachers' colleges stress field experiences such as student teaching in conjunction with thorough academic preparation for teaching. Prospective teachers choose specialization in either elementary or secondary education, and their preparation is geared toward this.

An example of present teacher training methods at American universities is provided by the Pennsylvania State University Capitol Campus, where I am a member of the faculty.

The teacher training program stresses thorough academic preparation and a variety of field experiences with a humanistic orientation throughout the curriculum.

The program has the following basic tenets:

1. A teacher is more effective if he knows himself well; aspects of the curriculum are aimed specifically at this philosophy.
2. The teacher should be trained to present the national interests in a way that is meaningful to him.
3. The teacher should have the opportunity to develop his own educational philosophy and goals.
4. The education curriculum should synthesize the theoretical and the practical as much as is possible.

These aims are implemented through the following means:

1. Only candidates are selected who meet the requirements dictated by the college teacher training program.
2. Upon admission teacher candidates go through rigorous training in the academic skills required by the profession combining these skills with extensive field experience in the classroom.
3. The curriculum includes thorough knowledge of child development and group dynamics.
4. Students are placed in the field directly and share time between the field experience and the classroom.
5. Students are guided to a thorough knowledge of the community and its influences on the school.
6. The methodology courses aimed at helping students learn how to teach are introduced in the final two years of the program.

7. Continuing attempts are made to connect the best in educational theory with the best in educational practice by the interrelatedness of the field and classroom experiences

Course content in the education curriculum ranges from physical education to modern math and from concrete to abstract concepts. The courses include integrated subject areas.

The practical application ranges from tutoring one child to teaching a whole class under the direction of the college supervisor and the classroom master teacher.

The faculty of the Capitol Campus is of diverse background, all having graduate degrees and most having attained doctoral degrees. The future trend is toward employment of only those with doctorate degrees. Most of the faculty have public school teaching and/or administrative experience at either the elementary or secondary level.

The mode of instruction is set by each instructor within the general framework of University objectives. Affective teaching is the trend, with students having the opportunity to express their concerns and incorporate them into the objectives of the course. Individualization of instruction is practiced as much as is possible.

Students choose their own faculty advisors to assist in planning their academic programs and helping when the need arises. Students also have the option of changing faculty advisors if they want to. Each professor engages in counseling with a group of advisees.

The rationale of the program can be summarized as a humanistic one, wherein the individual is the primary concern. Through extensive field

experience it is believed that the students will gain in self-knowledge and self-confidence and attain the positive self-image necessary to successful teaching. It is believed that if you know yourself, you can communicate more effectively. Thus the field experience is as important as the academic experience. The theoretical should approach the practical as much as possible in this as in other areas of teacher training.

The rationale also includes the belief that a diverse, well-prepared background on the part of the faculty makes teacher training more effective.

It is believed that self-initiated learning is more beneficial to students, that better learning is attained in this way. Inherent is the belief that you can teach teaching skills but not the ability to teach itself.

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